

GOD WITH US
Part 1: The Great Blessing
Genesis – Deuteronomy

**Message 3 – Abraham and Sarah: The calling of one
family to bless the whole world**
Genesis 12:1-25:11

Introduction

The story of Abraham and Sarah is both the longest and most important portion of the book of Genesis. This story forms the foundation of the nation of Israel and explains their role in the plans of God for the entire world. What hope is there for the nations that have been scattered throughout the world in the previous chapters of Genesis? The only hope is that God will build a kingdom of redemption in which all people are welcome. The people of Israel will, by God's grace, become a "kingdom of priests" mediating the love of God to a world lost in sin and darkness. The call of Abraham is God's gift of salvation to a world under divine judgment due to sin and rebellion.

The Call of Abraham: 12:1-9

The story begins as God calls a man named Abram (later renamed "Abraham") to leave his home country and go to a new land:

The Lord had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you. "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you" (12:1-3).

God's covenant with Abram forms the theological foundation for the rest of the Bible. God desires to bless *all peoples on earth*. He will begin this program of blessing by offering His presence to the world through the nation Israel. God's covenant with Abram involved 4 specific promises: 1) A great nation. 2) A great land. 3) A great name. 4) A great blessing to *all nations*.

People from all nations would be invited to come into a personal relationship with God by entering into the worship life of Israel. In a sense, you could say that Israel in the Old Testament was functioning along lines similar to the Church in the New

time period. Just as people, today, come to know God through participation in the life, witness and sacraments of the Church (the body of Christ), so in the Old Testament days people could come to know God by becoming attached to the life, witness and sacraments of Israel. If you were not born a Jew, you could still become a “proselyte” (i.e., convert) to the Jewish faith.

Abram was 75 years old when he departed from his homeland and headed to the land of Canaan. With him were Sarai (wife), Lot (nephew) and all the wider household of servants they had acquired along the way. They journeyed through the land of Canaan, and God reiterated His promise concerning *the great land*.

The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord, who had appeared to him. From there he went on toward the hills east of Bethel and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east. There he built an altar to the Lord and called on the name of the Lord” (12:7,8).

God’s fundamental disposition is always to BLESS us. In every age, He provides ways to offer mankind forgiveness of sins and a renewed relationship with Himself. In turn, in every age, man is responsible to respond to God’s gracious offer of salvation, by submitting to the terms God has prescribed. John’s gospel clearly describes God’s offer today, and our required response: “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

Abram’s sojourn in Egypt: 12:10-20

The first major event in the story of Abram and Sarai (later “Sarah”) is a temporary forced stay in Egypt due to a famine. Abram’s ability to trust God in the issues of his life was not well developed at this time. He put Sarai in a compromising situation in order to provide for his own safety.

It came about when he came near to Egypt, that he said to Sarai his wife, “See now, I know that you are a beautiful woman; and when the Egyptians see you, they will say, ‘This is his wife’; and

they will kill me, but they will let you live. Please say that you are my sister so that it may go well with me because of you, and that I may live on account of you” (12:11-13).

As feared, Pharaoh noticed Sarai’s beauty and took her into his harem. The only way they made it out of this “captivity” was when God brought about their deliverance.

“But the Lord struck Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram’s wife” (12:17).

Ultimately, Pharaoh gave Abram not only his wife back, but also many possessions. Thus, Abram and Sarai “exited” from Egypt, with many possessions, by the mighty hand of God striking Pharaoh’s house. Sound familiar?

Notice how this story *foreshadows* what will happen to the entire nation of Israel 400 years later at the time of the Exodus from Egypt. Then, as here, God will strike Pharaoh’s house with great plagues so that God’s bride, Israel, may be released. At the time of that greater Exodus, Israel will in like manner depart from Egypt with many possessions.

How encouraging to the people of Israel (Moses’ primary audience) as they learn that God’s plan for their deliverance was foreshadowed long, long ago, in the life of their original patriarch and his wife.

When we fail to keep our eyes on God and take matters into our own hands, we endanger ourselves and those who walk with us because we are stepping outside “the umbrella of God’s protection.” Protect your clan by keeping your eyes on God!

Abram and Lot Separate: 13:1-18

Both Abram and his nephew, Lot, were greatly blessed by the Lord in terms of their productivity and possessions. Eventually, they had to separate from one another due to the size of the respective herds. Abram, walking by faith, not by sight, allowed Lot to choose first which part of the land he would like for himself.

So Abram said to Lot, “Please let there be no strife between you and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers. Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me; if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left.” Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the valley of the Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere – this

was before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah – like the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt as you go to Zoar. So Lot chose for himself all the valley of the Jordan, and Lot journeyed eastward. Thus they separated from each other. Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled in the cities of the valley, and moved his tents as far as Sodom”(v.8-12).

After Lot moved away (toward Sodom!), God assured Abram that He was still keeping His promise to give Abram and his descendants the very best part of the land:

The Lord said to Abram, after Lot had separated from him, “Now lift up your eyes and look from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward; for all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants forever. I will make your descendants as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your descendants can also be numbered. Arise, walk about the land through its length and breadth; for I will give it to you.” Then Abram moved his tent and came and dwelt by the oaks of Mamre, which are in Hebron, and there he built an altar to the Lord” (13:14-18).

No amount of human reasoning or scheming would ever keep God from fulfilling His promises to Abram and his descendants. Abram’s part was to walk by faith and keep in step with God’s plan for his life. God’s part was to be the promise-keeper.

“There is a way that seem right to a man; but its end is the way is death” (Proverbs 14:12). So often we make major decisions in life based on what “seems right” to us. This was Lot’s way. The other way is to look to God, in humble dependence, for His leading and guidance. This was Abram’s way. The way of faith led Abram to a land of promise. The way of sight led Lot to a land of trouble. How are you making decisions about the path of your life?

War among kings and Abram’s rescue of Lot: 14:1-24

Genesis 14 describes an outbreak of international war over the land of Canaan, a war that ended up impacting the city of Sodom and Abram’s relative, Lot. Abram is here shown to be a man of faith in Yahweh, his God. Upon hearing that Lot was taken captive, Abram rallied a small force of just 318 “trained men” from his household and pursued the kings who had take Lot captive.

“He divided his forces against them by night, he and his servants, and defeated them, and pursued them as far as Hobah, which is north of Damascus. He brought back all the goods, and also brought back his relative Lot with his possessions, and also the women, and the people” (14:15,16).

Clearly, divine favor rests upon Abram and his clan. Fighting with God’s help, he can defeat the strongest enemy. This story would have been particularly encouraging to the Exodus generation as they made their way toward the Promised Land, with formidable enemies waiting to oppose them. God’s promise to Abram is sure: *“I (God) will bless those who bless you; and those who curse you, I will curse” (Genesis 12:3).*

At the end of this story we see Abram interacting with two kings who both wished to “bless” him for his help in the victory against the invaders. The way that Abram responded to these two kings is significant. Melchizedek, the king of Salem and priest of God Most High, came to pronounce a priestly blessing upon Abram:

He blessed Abram, saying, “Blessed be Abram by God Most High, creator of heaven and earth. And praise be to God Most High, who delivered your enemies into your hand.” Then Abram gave him a tenth of everything (14:19,20).

Abram’s response? He acknowledged the favor of God upon his life. He *paid a tithe (a tenth) of his possessions to Melchizedek as a thank offering to God Most High.*

In contrast, the king of Sodom offered to give Abram all of the worldly goods stemming from the victory. His response?

But Abram said to the king of Sodom, “With raised hand I have sworn an oath to the Lord, God Most High, Creator of heaven and earth, that I will accept nothing belonging to you, not even a thread or the strap of a sandal, so that you will never be able to say, ‘I made Abram rich’ (14:22,23).

Abram will not fall into the trap of human pride. He will not allow anyone to ever steal the credit that is due to God for blessing his life and making his way successful. To God *alone* be the glory!

The New Testament writer of the book of Hebrews points to a deeper significance to Melchizedek (see Hebrews chs.5-7). This king-priest was one of the first “types” (a person whose life prefigures) of Christ. How did Melchizedek prefigure Jesus Christ?

- He was uniquely *both* king and priest. Jesus is also both.
- He was “king of righteousness” (“Melchizedek”). Jesus is our righteous king, who imparts to us His righteousness.
- He was “king of peace” (“king of Salem”). Jesus is the king that brings us peace with God.
- He received tithes from Abram. Jesus receives our tithes and the offerings of our whole lives.

Many of the stories, people, rituals and events of the Old Testament will point us toward Christ, the ultimate fulfillment of God’s promise to bless the world through the seed of Abraham.

The self-dependent spirit says: I did it. I own it. I deserve it. I will hold on to it. The God-dependent spirit says: God did it. He owns it. I am privileged to be a steward of it. I will give back to Him as a sign of my dependence. Abram was the first person in the Bible to demonstrate the principle of “tithing” to God – giving a tenth of one’s income back to God. The New Testament affirms the practice of generously giving back to God as a way of acknowledging that He is the owner of everything; we are His wealth-managers, stewarding His resources for His purposes.

Renewal of the Promises/Covenant Ceremony: 15:1-21

This chapter opens with Abram wrestling in his heart over the long *delay* in God giving him his first son. God’s words to Abram show that God sees what is happening in Abram’s heart.

After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying, “Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; your reward shall be very great” (15:1).

Abram immediately raised the issue that he and Sarai were still without a child. Abram suggested that perhaps another who is from his wider household could become the heir of the divine promises. God’s response to Abram is clear and firm.

“One who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.” And He took him outside and said, “Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” And He said to him, “So shall your descendants be” (15:4,5).

Then, God enacted a *formal covenant ratification ceremony* with Abram. Note that Abram was put into a deep sleep while this ceremony took place. This indicates that the fulfillment of the covenant is solely dependent upon God, not upon Abram. It is, in effect, a unilateral agreement that God will fulfill.

It came about when the sun had set, that it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, "To your descendants I have given this land, from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite" (15:17-21).

There are significant new details given here about God's *timing* for the fulfillment of the promises. Yes, Abram and Sarai will have a son of their own, through whom the great nation will be built. Yet, the journey toward fulfillment will be long and will be woven together with God's ongoing plan for other nations as well.

God said to Abram, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a land that is not theirs, where they will be enslaved and oppressed four hundred years. But I will also judge the nation whom they will serve, and afterward they will come out with many possessions. As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age. Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete" (15:13-16).

- There will be oppression in a foreign land for 400 years (Egypt).
- God will deliver them mightily from the oppression (the Exodus).
- Abram will live a long life and die in peace (175 years!).
- In 4 generations, Abram's offspring will occupy the land again.
- The sin of the Amorites (Canaanites) had not yet reached the full measure that would move God to evict them from their land.

The ways of God are very complex. We often cannot understand why He does things in certain ways; but we must see that He is dealing with many interwoven factors all at the same time. Abram probably wondered: Why must my descendants wait 400 more years to inherit the Promised Land? Because God was giving the Canaanites 400 more years to repent and to turn back to Him. Abram had to learn to trust that, in his own lifetime, God would be faithful to fulfill those parts of the promise that were necessary. Abram also had to trust that God's plans and purposes were much bigger than his own life. This is not an easy lesson to learn. As we will see with Abram, the temptation is always to "help God get things moving." When we do this, we actually are getting in God's way and end up making trouble for ourselves!

Abram, Sarai and the Egyptian maid Hagar: 16:1-16

After waiting 10 years for a child, Abram and Sarai decided to help God get the plan moving. Sarai suggested that her Egyptian maid, Hagar, become a surrogate mother to bear a child for them. They failed to pray and seek God in this critical decision. Their plan seemed to work perfectly . . . until after the child was born.

He went in to Hagar, and she conceived; and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her sight. And Sarai said to Abram, “May the wrong done me be upon you. I gave my maid into your arms, but when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her sight. May the Lord judge between you and me.” But Abram said to Sarai, “Behold, your maid is in your power; do to her what is good in your sight.” So Sarai treated her harshly, and she fled from her presence (v.4-6).

God came to Hagar in her flight and promised to make a great nation from her son. In a tender exchange, God named Hagar’s son. In turn, Hagar gave a name to God.

Ishmael = “**God hears**” my cries as a used and forsaken woman.

Elroi = “**God sees**” my situation and extends His love toward me.

At God’s command, Hagar returned to Abram and Sarai, submitting herself to them. Thus, Ishmael grew up in Abram’s family. As the story will later unfold, Hagar and Ishmael become ongoing rivals to Sarai and her son, Isaac. This interfamily conflict ultimately produced later international conflict. The descendants of Ishmael became a perpetual thorn in the side of the descendants of Abram through Isaac.

Often when we are going through a prolonged trial, we can begin to doubt God’s love and believe that He has forgotten about us; that He does not see or care about our struggle. The story of Hagar invites us, in the midst of our darkness and doubt, to remember that “God sees” (El-roi) our situation, and “God hears” (Isham-El) our cries. God never loses sight of His children!

Promise renewal/Circumcision; name changes: 17:1-18:15

Thirteen more years pass and still no firstborn for Abram and Sarai. God comes once again to reaffirm His intention to fulfill His promises for Abram and Sarai, even though they are now old.

“I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. I will

establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly” (17:1,2).

As a further proof of God’s intention, He renamed Abram and Sarai to reflect their promised future:

“As for Me, behold, My covenant is with you, and you will be the father of a multitude of nations. No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations” (17:4,5).

“As for Sarai your wife, you shall not call her name Sarai, but Sarah shall be her name. I will bless her, and indeed I will give you a son by her. Then I will bless her, and she shall be a mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her” (17:15,16).

“Abraham” means “father of a multitude.” “Sarah” means “princess.” Thus, God confirms His promise to make Abraham the father of a great nation, and Sarah the princess through whom all nations will be blessed.

God gave one more very significant name to the couple. The soon-to-be-born son will be called “Isaac” (“laughter”). Why this name? When Abraham heard that a son would be born to them *next year*, he was shocked (due to their age) and even suggested that God use Ishmael to fulfill His plan. He laughed in disbelief!

Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, “Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And will Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?” And Abraham said to God, “Oh that Ishmael might live before You!”

Again, in the next chapter, when Sarah heard that God was about to give her a child, she laughed, and God called her out on it!

Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in age; Sarah was past childbearing. Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I have become old, shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?” And the Lord said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh, saying, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, when I am so old?’ Is anything too difficult for the Lord? At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.” Sarah denied it however, saying, “I did not laugh”; for she was afraid. And He said, “No, but you did laugh” (18:11-15).

Clearly, they were having difficulty believing that God would actually still fulfill His promise to give *them* their very own child,

through whom the nation would be built. The name of their son, “Isaac,” was a perpetual reminder to them that God’s promises may be miraculous and surprising; but they are never a joke.

Genesis 17:9-14 records that God commanded Abraham to circumcise all male descendants on the 8th day after birth, as a perpetual sign of the covenant between God and the nation that would come from Abraham (Israel). The chapter concludes with Abraham obeying this command with his household (17:23-27).

Genesis 18:1-15 records a personal visit of the Lord to Abraham and Sarah’s tent. This seems to have happened around the same time as the events of ch.17, roughly 1 year before Isaac was born.

“Theophanies” (appearances of God) were frequent in the O.T. It is likely that it was the 2nd person of the Trinity, the Son of God, who was appearing in pre-incarnate form. In this particular instance, God came to Abraham and Sarah along with 2 angels. They seem to be stopping in for a visit on their way to execute God’s judgment against Sodom and Gomorrah (18:16-19:38).

God is not in a hurry to fulfill His plan. Abraham waited 25 years for the first son. Moses spent 40 years in the desert before being called to lead Israel. David was anointed as a teenager, but waited until he was 30 to become king. Paul spent 14 years in Arabia before emerging as the key apostle. Jesus grew for 30 years before ministering for 3 years. The principle? God is more concerned with what He is doing IN YOU, than what He is doing THROUGH YOU. God will patiently grow the heart of His servant, even if this means that the “program” has to wait a few more years . . . or a few more decades! God is very patient.

God’s judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah: 18:16-19:38

This section of the Abraham narrative serves two main purposes: 1) It is a warning to the Exodus generation as they head toward the land of Canaan under the leadership of Moses. The land is filled with unrighteousness. Israel must *not* fall into conformity with the wickedness of Canaan. They must follow God’s laws and stand out as a “*nation of priests, a holy nation*” (Exodus 19:5,6), otherwise the judgment of God will fall upon them, as it did on Sodom and Gomorrah. 2) This section also highlights the role of Abraham as a mediator and intercessor, the one through whom the blessings and protection of God come to others.

- Abraham the intercessor: 18:16-33

Once Abraham realizes God's intention to bring judgment upon Sodom and Gomorrah, he intercedes on behalf of the righteous remnant that dwells there. Surely he has in mind Lot (his nephew) and Lot's family, who had previously settled in Sodom. Abraham asks God: *Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?* If there are 50 righteous? No! If there are 45 righteous? No! If there are 40 righteous? No! If there are 30 righteous? No! If there are 20 righteous? No! If there are 10 righteous? No!

The point is clear: God is absolutely JUST and PRECISE in the way that He brings judgment to humanity. God makes no mistakes in the execution of His judgment against humanity's sin. As the following narrative demonstrates, God went even further than Abraham's questioning. God spared 4 persons from the judgment.

- Judgment on Sodom and Gomorrah: 19:1-29

After rescuing Lot from Sodom, God's judgment fell upon the cities of the valley due to their extreme departure from the moral will of God. The narrative leaves little doubt that the inhabitants of Sodom were ruthless, self-centered and engrossed in all forms of sexual immorality. They did not hesitate to attack Lot's house, demanding that the two male visitors be given to their mob to be raped and sexually abused. Lot, his wife and their two daughters were quickly ushered out of the town by the two men (angels). Lot's wife disobeyed a clear command: *"Do not look behind you"* (19:17). As they were fleeing, she did look back. The text reads: *"She became a pillar of salt."* It could be that she not only "looked back" to Sodom (with a sense of longing), but also turned back, and ended up being caught in the fiery judgment of God that fell from heaven upon the cities of the valley.

- Lot's daughters commit incest with him: 19:30-38

The relationship between Lot and his two daughters is a case study in father-daughter dysfunction. Lot had previously humiliated his daughters by *offering them* to the lust-filled mob in place of the two male visitors. *"Do to them as seems good in your sight"* (19:8). Now, hiding in a cave with their father, after the destruction of Sodom, they wonder how they will ever find husbands and bear children. (The two men to whom they were engaged had remained behind and died in the destruction of Sodom.) Their answer was *not* to trust in God; rather, it was to debase their father by getting him drunk and having sexual

relations with him. The result of these incestuous relations was the nations of the Moabites and Ammonites, both perpetual enemies of Israel as they sought to enter the Promised Land centuries later (19:37,38). Moses is explaining to the Exodus generation not only the roots of their blessings in the promises of God; but also *the roots of their struggles in the sinful schemes of men and women who failed to walk by faith in centuries past.*

One of the great lessons of the Pentateuch is that our present actions impact future generations. The fruits of both our righteous actions and our sinful choices might not be seen in the present. But most assuredly, God will visit both the sins of the fathers AND the righteousness of the fathers upon the children . . . even to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 34:6,7). What sorts of “gifts” are you preparing for your future generations to open? Are they gifts of divine blessing; or divine chastisement?

Abraham lies to Abimelech about Sarah: 20:1-18

Abraham repeats once again his sinful strategy of lying about his wife Sarah, saying that she is “his sister,” in order to protect himself. Abimelech, king of Gerar, took the (still) beautiful Sarah into his possession. God subsequently brought judgment upon Abimelech’s household. In the end, Abraham interceded “*for Abimelech and his wife and his maids*” because they had all become barren during the time that Sarah was in their possession. Several lessons here: 1) Abraham’s faith is still very much “in process,” even at this stage of his life. 2) The favor and protection of God rests upon Abraham and Sarah, even when they are not walking precisely within God’s ways. (Recall from ch.15 that God’s covenant with Abraham was unilateral; it depended only on the faithfulness of God, not on the faithfulness of Abraham.) 3) We see again the role of Abraham as the mediator of God’s blessings to others. Israel as a nation will later be asked to take this same role: to mediate God’s blessings to the world.

The birth of Isaac; Hagar and Ishmael sent away: 21:1-34

Finally, a son is born to Abraham (100 yrs.) and Sarah (91)! They rejoice and name him “laughter” (“Isaac”). Sarah gives her own reason for the name: “*God has made laughter for me; and everyone who hears will laugh with me*” (21:6). Recall that God had a very different reason in mind when *He told them* to name the boy “Isaac” (see 17:17 and 18:11-15).

The birth of Isaac created further stress in the relationship between Sarah and her Egyptian maid, Hagar, who had previously born Ishmael to Abraham (Genesis 16). Although Abraham was “*greatly distressed*” over the loss of Ishmael his son, God gave him permission to send Hagar and Ishmael away (21:8-21), promising to bless the boy. In fact, God twice promised to bless Hagar’s son and to make a great nation of him (21:13,18). Indeed, the descendants of Ishmael became *many* great nations, some of which became archrivals to Israel in the years ahead.

Abraham commanded to sacrifice Isaac: 22:1-25

The defining scene in Abraham’s faith-journey came when God asked him to sacrifice Isaac on an altar. This was a test of Abraham’s unqualified *love for God* (22:12). Abraham obeyed quickly and exactly the command given to him by God. How could Abraham possibly sacrifice the very son through whom God promised to make the great nation? From the New Testament comments on this incident, we learn that Abraham had the faith to believe that God could raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary, to fulfill His promises. The writer of the book of Hebrews explains:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was he to whom it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.’ He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead, from which he also received him back as a type” (Hebrews 11:17-19).

At the last moment, God provided a substitute sacrifice in place of Isaac – a ram caught in a nearby bush. As a fitting tribute to this divine provision, Abraham gave a name to God and to that mountain: Yahweh-jireh. “God provides.”

God is looking for unqualified love from each of us. He wants to be first in our lives, not second, third or fourth. Sometimes God will come to us and test our hearts by putting His hand on something that is most precious to us. When He does this, we must sense what He is really after: the full devotion of our hearts. When God comes to you in this way, lay your Isaac down on the altar. One way or another, God will provide for the genuine needs of your heart and He will make a way forward for you.

This scene between Abraham and Isaac gives us another “type” or picture of Jesus Christ. God provided *a substitute sacrifice* to die in Isaac’s place. Jesus is the Lamb that God provided as our

substitute sacrifice, to die in our place. All of us can rejoice with Abraham and Isaac, declaring: “YAHWEH-JIREH!” God has provided the necessary sacrifice for our salvation.

The death and burial of Sarah: 23:1-20

Sarah lived 127 years, and then died in the land of Canaan. The purpose of this chapter is not simply to record her death and burial; rather, it is to record the process by which Abraham provided for Sarah’s burial by purchasing land in Canaan, rather than burying her in her ancestral land as was customary. Abraham has been a sojourner in the land, without owning *anything*. Now, upon Sarah’s death, he purchases a field belonging to the sons of Heth.

So Ephron’s field, which was in Machpelah, which faced Mamre, the field and cave which was in it, and all the trees which were in the field, that were within all the confines of its border, were deeded over to Abraham for a possession in the presence of the sons of Heth, before all who went in at the gate of his city. After this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field at Machpelah facing Mamre (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan. So the field and the cave that is in it, were deeded over to Abraham for a burial site by the sons of Heth (23:17-20).

The message? In Abraham’s day, Israel was given its first installment of the *great land* God had promised to them.

Finding a wife for Isaac: 24:1-67

Chapter 24 details the process by which Abraham arranged a wife for his son, Isaac. Abraham exercised faith by keeping his son from marrying a Canaanite wife. He determined to send his servant back to his homeland to find a wife from among his kinsmen. Twice he commanded the servant: Whatever happens, *do not take my son Isaac back to that land!* The message is strong: Isaac is the heir to God’s promise to give us *the land of Canaan*. He must never go back to the land of Ur, from which we came.

The servant went on the long journey back to Mesopotamia, where Abraham’s relatives dwelt. God led him into an encounter with Rebekah, granddaughter of Abraham’s brother, Nahor. He told Abraham’s relatives how God had blessed his master. They sensed God’s hand in the matter of Rebekah, and sent her off to become the wife of Isaac, and heiress of the promises of God. As the servant and Rebekah reached the place where Isaac waited, the

narrative takes on a rather romantic tone in describing their initial encounter. Truly, it was love at first sight!

Isaac went out to meditate in the field toward evening; and he lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, camels were coming. Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac she dismounted from the camel. She said to the servant, "Who is that man walking in the field to meet us?" And the servant said, "He is my master." Then she took her veil and covered herself. The servant told Isaac all the things that he had done. Then Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and he took Rebekah, and she became his wife, and he loved her; thus Isaac was comforted after his mother's death" (24:63-67).

The stage is now set for the story to continue in the lives of Isaac and Rebekah, heirs of the promise God made to Abraham and Sarah. Their story forms the next panel of the Genesis narrative.

Abraham's Death: 25:1-11

Abraham had many other sons and daughters; but they were all "sent away" in order to leave Isaac alone in the land of promise. Only in Isaac's seed will the divine promise find its true fulfillment.

Abraham died at 175 years of age, and was buried next to his wife in the burial plot he had purchased from the sons of Heth. In his life, the foundation was laid for the blessings of God to come to all the nations.

In the Old Testament, the "children of Abraham" were the people of Israel. In the New Testament, the concept of "Abraham's children" is broadened out to include all (Jew or Gentile) who share in the faith of Abraham. So, Paul writes to the Galatian Church: "The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God. What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would declare the Gentiles to be righteous because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith" (Galatians 3:7-9). If you have placed your faith in Jesus as your Savior, your substitute sacrifice, then you are a true child of Abraham, enjoying God's promise to bless ALL the nations through this one man!